

NORTH EAST INDIA LAND AND PEOPLE SERIES - 2

Series Editor: K. Jose SVD

THE LEPCHA OF SIKKIM

Sumitabha Chakraborty



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SANSKRITI - NEICR PUBLICATION

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THE LEPCHA OF SIKKIM

Sumitabha Chakraborty



SANSKRITI

**NORTH EASTERN INSTITUTE OF
CULTURE AND RELIGION
GUWAHATI (INDIA)**

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FOREWORD

K. Jose SVD

The wonderland, Sikkim is the 22nd and one of the youngest state of India with a population of 5,40,493 and an area of 7,096 sq.km., lies in the heart of eastern Himalayas and is wedged between West Bengal, Nepal, China, Tibet and Bhutan. This land was inhabited in pre-historic times by three tribes – Naong, Chang and the Mon. On the 16th May, 1975, Sikkim became a full-fledged State of the Indian Union and the Institution of Chogyal was abolished. This state mainly consists of mountainous terrain, interspersed with ravines and verdant valleys. The snow clad Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain dominates the tiny state and is considered as the guardian deity of Sikkim. Teesta and Rangit are the main rivers. This blessed land, consecrated personally by Guru Padmasambhava, during his sojourn to Tibet is bestowed with exceptional natural beauty. It is an enchanting land with lofty peaks, verdant valleys, serpentine streams, holy lakes, ancient monasteries and a rich variety of flora and fauna. This land is known as the 'kingdom of flowers' has over 4,000 varieties of wild flowers, rare trees and shrubs including 700 species of rare orchids. It is a paradise for the botanists, nature lovers, folklorists and anthropologists. The stunning environment is a delight for the lovers of adventure sports.

The tribal homeland of the Lepcha people is referred to as *ne máyel lyáng* 'hidden paradise' or *ne máyel málúk lyáng* 'land of eternal purity'. The Lepcha

are believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim. Today the Lepcha people constitute a minority of the population of modern Sikkim. Due to mountainous peculiarities, modern infrastructure development is a tough task involving huge expenditure. Agro-climatic conditions are favourable for horticulture, floriculture, off-season vegetables and orchids. Lepcha is very hard working; they work steadily and for very long hours. This Celebrating community finds often occasions to celebrate monastic feasts or calendric festivals. It is interesting to see at times after prolonged hours of feasting, they time to time put their heads under the running stream to take away the fumes of the *Chi*.

It is encouraging to note that when any conflict occurs, the entire village makes effort to handle it using a variety of strategies. After trying out mutual feasts, exorcisms against the malevolent spirits which cause the conflicts the village officials may become involved as referees. If this too fails, a call for paying a heavy fine as well as organizing expensive feasts will bring in the desired results because they can't afford the fines and costs, they quickly decide to drop their hostilities. After that, the adjudicators will eat and drink with the disputants, and give them long advices on the value of living in peace.

Over the years we as an emerging Anthropological Research Institute have taken up various initiatives to do original research into the cultures and peoples of North East India. Our committed Sanskriti Foundation Fellows with the assistance of research co-coordinating team undertook many consultations and national seminars with themes pertaining to a number of socio-cultural and other related themes specific to the communities of North East India. *SANSKRITI* – NEICR, Guwahati, founded in 2006 by Divine Word Society (SVD), from its inception works with a vision towards providing reliable and

researched data on Cultures, Religions and Society as a whole with special reference to North East India with an aim to promote a just, peace loving and humane society. In this effort we net work with other research institutions, universities, NGOs and Government departments to preserve, promote and disseminate various cultures through research, documentation and publications on languages, fine arts, cultural symbols, indigenous knowledge systems of people to promote development in view of socio-cultural, economic, political and religious advancement of people. This Institute has been hosting annual national seminars on different themes related to the cultures and religions of the people of North East India. The proceedings of the seminars are published in to comprehensive volumes as well.

The main objective of this institute is to disseminate and advance knowledge by providing quality, data based research/ facilities in such branches of social sciences which may play a positive role in the socio-economic, cultural and religious development of the people of North East India. We are sure that a blending of proper and appropriate technologies and intellectual pursuits with the natural resources and ethnic wealth of the region can promote human development and economic advancement par excellence. As we have undertaken efforts to net-work with other like minded organizations and individuals within the next couple of years time we hope to establish a mini museum, reference library, publish bi-yearly news letters, yearly research journal, a couple of one day consultations on major issues pertaining to our region including identifying research priorities of the region, publishing of occasional papers by the faculty and an yearly national seminar on one of the most current themes.

Over the years this institute has been building up a growing library with a number of books on North East India. The Director together with the Foundation Fellows of the Institute has jointly edited five volumes of books based on the themes of the national seminars from 2007 to 2010. It has also planned to bring out a number of books in the near future. North East India: Land and People Series is one of such initiatives that has been taken up and this book by Dr. Sumitabha Chakraborty, an eminent name among anthropologists in India, is the second one in this series. Over the next couple of years we hope to cover a number of monographs under this title. This will be done by well known anthropologists of the region. Among our other forthcoming publications Life and Works of Eminent Social Scientists deserve special mention.

In this thought-provoking study, The Lepcha of Sikkim, a brief ethnography of the Lepcha is given by Dr. Chakraborty - and in the name of Sanskriti I appreciate his wonderful effort - while he also elaborates on the sequence of belief, ritual and practices. Based on intensive and prolonged field work, the author has successfully portrayed the Lepcha tribal society, depicting how the power of spiritualism interwoven with every sphere of the Lepcha life as a guiding force for each and every single person in the society. The book will definitely provide insights to the general readers, anthropologists, planners, policymakers, researchers, tribal administrators and other social scientists. I dedicate this volume to the innumerable tribal communities in the world who search for identity amidst the fast changing scenario both within their community and among a number of other communities who show determination and perseverance to move ahead in spite of many odds.

PREFACE

The idea of preparing a volume on the Lepcha, one of the indigenous tribal group of Sikkim, the tiniest state of North-East India, is the outcome of the constant academic pressure from my senior colleague Dr. Gautam Kumar Bera and definitely the respected Father K. Jose, SVD. Both of them are anthropologists and Fr. Jose is heading an emerging anthropological research institute namely *SANSKRITI* – North Eastern Institute of Culture and Religion, as its Director. He conceived an idea of portraying the ethno-cultural profile of North East Indian Tribes and as a matter of fact he advised me to contribute a volume, the second one in the series. This gave me an impetus to germinate an idea that emerged in my mind ever since the first visit to Dzongu, the Lepcha land, about five years ago for anthropological field work among the Lepcha. I made number of successive visits during 2007-2011 for the continuation of my anthropological field work as a longitudinal study but somehow the idea of writing a book exclusively on the Lepcha could not materialize due to lack of competence and lacuna in comprehension. Once during the course of my thesis that dormant wish of writing a volume on Lepcha sparked again, which ultimately culminated a few months back.

The other inspiration for the present work always comes exclusively from my family since I remained away from them during the entire period of prolong fieldwork in different Lepcha dominated areas of west and south district of Sikkim apart from Dzongu alone choosing to settle down in the remote villages for my

career commitment. It was really the memorable phase of my life, roamed amidst the forest with the Lepcha, talked with them hours after hours, gossip with the women folk and played with the kids. I was extremely attracted with the physical landscape and the very kind hearted, soft spoken people and their immense hospitality. They spoke out very interesting tales from which I searched out the existence of power of spiritualism, because the entire cosmos as they believed is the abode of different spirits both malevolent and benevolent. On the way of our journey they pointed out the trees, the streams, the mountain gorges, and trail and so on for the presence of the supernatural power. Sometimes they mentioned about the appearance of different birds and other creatures which help them to get off from misery. All these knowing ideas about insistence of belief system as the onset of their culture is the principle theme of present work. I have drawn few basic tenets of the Lepcha belief system assuming that despite differences among the people, there is some commonness of shared values, experiences, behaviour towards belief. It helped me to draw how beliefs act as a catalyst to maintain ethnocentric ideas.

After reaching into the lush green high mountain land of Sikkim my world started revolving round *Mayel-lyang, Fodong-thing, Nazaong-nyo, Rum, moong, boong-thing, mun, kuchung-kup, kuchung-phang, kudo, kuhu, maung-chi, fo* and so on. At one point of time I was tired and could not grab the nexus of nature man relationship. My mind felt undisturbed as long I got acquainted with that information. I tried with my entire endeavour; visited the Lepcha household again and again, met with the aged people, discussed the matter with them. After a couple of days I could actually realize that apart from the material world,

the Lepcha have a very close affiliation with 'power of spiritualism' originated into their mind from belief and to substantiated those belief oriented power of spirits they seek refuge to mythological interpretation.

What makes a place good and bad or safe and dangerous, and when do settlement and movement make sense? This was my first question asked to the Lepcha. Besides, I also had to find out if the concerns in my mind were questions for the Lepcha in his or her own cultural context. It is important to understand how different cultures would answer questions. However, most of the questions were not considered as pertinent enough. But it was a matter of great astonishment to me when a middle aged Lepcha man described few of their beliefs; I was overwhelmed thinking that how the people would know the right kind of information I am searching eagerly. For the Lepcha everything around is the elements referred not only to the natural aspects of Lepcha space, such as sun, moon, eclipses, whirlwind, storm, earthquakes, winds; but also the animals, like the barking of dog, appearance of different birds from different directions, monkeys and as well as the spirits. These elements constitute an integral part of the Lepcha world-view; visible and invisible, animate and inanimate and the changes they have undergone to bring them to their present state are the activities of spiritual power. According to them, present world is an ocean, under that ocean there is an earth, and beneath that there live *It-po-mu*, the creative mother and her husband *De-bu*.

The Lepcha believe that the death of human beings, wrong deeds, and disrespect to the *Rum* transformed the humans into spirits. It is these spirits who then can move anywhere and everywhere. The Lepcha also believe that although spirits, humans and

animals share a common space, it is through their different capacities of movement that each remains alive within different places within that space. Spirits hunt humans and displace them by killing and taking them away from the land. Human being hunts the animals and takes them away from the forest. This relationship of hunting, loss of life and displacement maintains a hierarchical relation. The Lepcha relationship with spiritualism and human is not viewed rather it can only be realized. That is why my pin-pointed intervention sometimes puzzles the Lepcha. Moreover it has been found that on the other hand they practice religion without any feeling of theoretical discomfort. The religion is better termed as 'munism'; a kind of shamanic religion based on traditional belief system is the manifestation and worship of supernatural spirits with animal sacrifice. This is a nutshell about the people, belief, which embraced me with glory and hope. I was then really immersed in it, enslaved by it. This is all about my first hand impression of a small, isolated tribal milieu rooted with immense cultural heritage.

Sikkim has attracted me otherwise also due to its lush green forest coverage, interlocking mountain massif and interactive responses of the people. Since the beginning of 17th century the country had to face numerous invasions from its neighboring countries, Bhutan and Nepal. Consequently, the large portion of its land was annexed by these countries. Possibly the gift of modernization did not encroach the area so much for denuding the forest cover. In one way the overwhelming cultural contour of the Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalee and on the other hand the lush green carpet has immersed me in eloquent silence. Trekking along the forest path and mountain trail with the Lepcha man I often reminded the famous lines of

Rabindranath Tagore, which speaks about the distant difficult terrain path is just like a crazy land, where the mother earth rests on its variable qualities...

“...*Sudurgam durodesh –
Pathosunyo torusunyo prantor ashesh
Mahapipashar rango-bhumi; roudraloke
Jwalanto balukarashi suchi bidhe chokhe;
Diganto bistrilo jeno dhulisajyar pore
Jwaratura Basundhara lutaiche pore
Taptadeha, sushkakantha sangohin...*”

I was tremendously influenced with the rhythmic life of the Lepcha witnessing the hard working material life, agricultural performances in the terrace slopes and especially observing the belief rituals - the rhythm of life has witnessed the fairy, *Chum-darmit*, whose appearance ascertains the fate of the baby and classifies the female folk in four distinct categories experiencing the plight of religious worship.

This study therefore set out to deal with a brief ethnography of the Lepcha and concentrating the sequence of belief, ritual and practices. The sequence of the chapters is therefore structured and flavoured in the way the Lepcha culture was understood by me. I intend to depict how the power of spiritualism interwoven with every sphere of the Lepcha life as a guiding force.

A piece of acknowledgement is an expression of gratitude since it reflects input from many sources and co-operation. Firstly, I have no option but to mention the name of Gyaltsso Tshering Lepcha and S.T.Bhutia and their family members, who not only helped me in many ways but also looked after my hospitality across the span of study period. During the course of the study I have come across a host of intellectuals, academicians, scholars and friends who

provided a tremendous support and encouragement for conducting such type of work. Apart from the Lepcha brethrens I must have mentioned a name of my very close friend Dr. Kanad Das, the Officer-in-Charge of Botanical Survey of India, Sikkim Circle, whose tireless effort gives me very easy access to the Secretariat and other administrative offices. I owe my gratitude to Dr. Narendra Gurung, Scientist-E of ICAR, who helped me a lot by providing primary and secondary information related with the economy of the Lepcha. Last but not the least; I owe my deep sense of gratitude to Father K. Jose SVD who amidst his hectic schedule extended moral support and constant academic cooperation to publish the present volume.

I have always believed that the best way to produce a literary thing can only be possible due to continuous conceptualization of the theme with creation. During past two years I have been continually thinking to develop a literary account on the Lepcha but many doubts and skepticism drag me further until I recovered the answer of unknowing questions. Still I search out on which aspect I would search for more, because there are few arenas of the Lepcha account have already been documented; besides less study have ever been conducted on their belief pattern, ritual practices and obviously the myths related with it. Therefore, I concentrated on it and ultimately the attempt is turned into a form of publication. I wish to dedicate this book to a very energetic, intelligent Lepcha boy - *Kasang*.

Map of Sikkim: showing the Districts and Area



Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Sikkim, a small mountainous state as recognized 'Nye-mae-el' (paradise) by the Lepcha; 'Beymul Denjong' (the hidden valley of rice) by the Bhutias and 'Su Khim' (new house) by the Limbu group of the Nepalese (Sharma, 1983) has witnessed great changes in its political structure, social structure, economic life and cultural values during the past hundred years. Some scholars opined that the word "Sikkim" was derived from 'Su Khim', originally a word of reference to mean the new house by the Limbu group of the Nepalese population. Few scholars have been found its roots in the Sanskrit word, which means 'crested or mountainous country'. Regarding the etymology of the word Sikkim there are many views, many opinions, but it must be noted that Sikkim is one of the most enthralling regions in the Himalayas. From administrative point of view, Sikkim has been divided into four districts - east, west, north and south.

Living on the western flank of the Eastern Himalaya, Sikkim, one of the smallest states in India is flavoured with floral bounty and land-locked terrain. The state lies on the north of West Bengal and located between 27° 05' - 28° 09' North latitude and 87° 57' - 88° 56' East longitude. Sikkim is oblong in shape with a north to south length of approximately 112 km. and an east to west breadth of approximately 64 km. that gives it a total landmass of 7096 square kilometers. Close to three-quarters of its perimeter that covers most of the east and the west including the entire

northern borderline has a contiguous mountain range surrounding the terrain within. The southern fringe of Sikkim, devoid of a Himalayan barrier opens out to the Plains of Bengal and it is towards this direction that Sikkim's two major river systems, the Teesta and Rangeet flow down to drain the land. This gigantic horseshoe enclosure causes the trapping of moisture-laden winds from the Bay of Bengal and results in high precipitation round the year. The state is bounded by Nepal in the West, Bhutan in the east, Tibet in the north and northeast and West Bengal in the south.

The Chola range is pierced by several passes, the most frequented of which are the Tangkar La (16000 feet), Nathu La (14,200 feet), Jelep La (14,390 feet), Kongra La (13,350 feet). From the Northwest face of the Donkya Mountain an immense spur takes off, and runs first west and then southwest to Khangchendzonga, forming the watershed of all the remote sources of the Teesta River. These basins have a southward slope, being broad at the top where they leave the watershed, and gradually contracting like a fan from its rim to its handle, in the Teesta valley near Pashok (Porter, 1931). It will be noticed that a great many of these mountains and rivers are mentioned in the Lepcha mythology, and appear in the creation myths, whilst they are also spoken of in numerous folk tales.

Historical Account

Historical information revealed that Sikkim was known to early European Travelers, such as Horace Della Penna and Samuel Van de Putte, as the name of Bramashon, while Bogle called it Demojong. Since the beginning of 17th century the country had to face numerous invasions from its neighboring countries, Bhutan and Nepal. Consequently, the large portion of

its land was annexed by these countries. The Nepalese conquered the lower Teesta, Bhutan annexed the entire region on the East of the river Teesta including the present day Kalimpong subdivision and Tibet took over Chumbi valley, and thus made the Chola and Jelep La Ranges Northern and Eastern boundary (Singh, 1993). Local tradition asserts that the ancestors of the Rajas of Sikkim originally came from the neighbourhood of Lhasa in Tibet. About middle of the 17th century, the head of the family was named Puntso Namgyal; and to him repaired three Tibetan monks, Professor of the Nyingmapa (or 'red cap' sect of Buddhism), who were disgusted at the predominance of the Gelukpa sect in Tibet. These lamas, according to Mr. Edgar's report, succeeded in converting the Lepcha of Sikkim to their own faith, and in making Puntso Namgyal Raja of the country. The avatars of two of these lamas are now the heads, respectively, of the two great monasteries of Pemiangtse and Tashiding.

In 1788 the Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in the governorship of the Morang, and only retired in 1789, on the Tibetan Government ceding to them a piece of territory at the head of the Koti pass. But in 1792, on the second invasion of Tibetan territory by the Gurkhas, an immense Chinese army advanced to the support of the Tibetans, defeated the Gurkhas and dictated terms to them almost at the gates of Kathmandu. The Anglo-Gurkha war and the signing of the treaty of Sugauli (1815) between Nepal and the East India Company and signing of the Treaty of Titaliya (1816) between the East India Company and Sikkim introduced a new phase in the history of Sikkim. The treaty of Titaliya marked the beginning of the British influence in Sikkim.

According to the history, the Lepcha kings, Tur-Ve, Tur-Ayek, Tur-Sang-Pano and Tur-Sung reigned apparently at the same time in different parts of the country. The Rong-folk history is very obscure, and it was only when these four had died, their places were taken by treasurers, secretaries and headman. The recorded history of Sikkim begins with the coming of Buddhism and the founding of the Namgyal dynasty in the 17th century. The genealogy of Phuntsog Namgyal, crowned first Raja of Sikkim in 1642, extends back to Minyak dynasty in Tibet, from there to the royal family of Kosla, a small princely Kingdom in what is present day Himachal Pradesh. It was only around the 15th century that his ancestors first made contact with the local inhabitants of Sikkim. *Khye Bumsa* (Phuntsog Namgyal's great grandfather's great grandfather) came to Sikkim from Tibet in search of the Lepcha *Boongthing Thekung Tek*, who was believed to be the 6th direct descendant of the original Lepcha Chief. Mythological account revealed that *Khye Bumsa* 'equaling a 1,00,000 men' – a sobriquet he earned for his legendary strength which he demonstrated by putting up the pillars of the Sakya monastery in Tibet single handed – was childless and sought the blessings of the Lepcha priest. As predicted by *Thekung Tek*, three sons were born to *Khye Bumsa*, who returned to Sikkim with them. *Khy Bumsa*, his three sons, *Thekung Tek* and his wife sowed a blood-brotherhood pact. The Lepcha priest erected nine stones facing Khangchendzonga at Kabi (north of Gangtok) and invoked all the guardian deities of Sikkim and the sacred mountain to witness the covenant between the Lepcha and the Bhutias. To this day the pact is celebrated by the Sikkimese on the 15th day of the 9th month of the Tibetan calendar. The stones erected by *Thekung Tek* are still standing

at Kabi Longchok - mute witness to that historic accord. The four grandson of *Khye Bumsa* were the first among his descendants to actually settle in Sikkim (Sharma, 1983). The kingship of Phuntsog Namgyal had quasi-religious overtones. He was called the *Chogyal* (Dharma-Raja). In order to help administer the land he appointed 12 *jongpens* (from the prominent Lepcha families) and 12 *kazis* (from the leading Bhutia families) as governors. He succeeded by his son, who built the palace at Rabdentse (West Sikkim), which was razed, to the ground by the invoking Gurkha soldiers in the 18th century.

The 18th & 19th centuries were marked by frequent invasions from Bhutan and Nepal, mostly from the latter and the Sikkimese was constantly embroiled in brutal wars. Following arrival of the British, in their search for trade routes to Tibet, the first Nepali settlers came. This was to change the ethnic balance here, and it was long before the Nepali population was in a majority. However, politically, the power was still retained by the Bhutia, and the Lepcha only. By the late 19th century Sikkim had become a protectorate of the British, an arrangement that was inherited by India when the British left. This arrangement was continued on the basis of the Indo-Sikkim treaty of 1950. In the 1950s and 1960s there was a latent resentment among the masses and a fervent plea arose for 'one-man, one vote'. Democratic aspirations in the people had been awakened. This eventually resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and culminated in 1975, with the merger of Sikkim with India.

In contemporary period the kingship system had been changed, all villages are governed by a '*kazi*'. He is the man who ranks next to the Maharaja, and is a

hand-owner. Then next to him comes the 'mandal', the village headman. In the year 1641, Phungtsog Namgyal was consecrated as the first Bhutia King of Namgyal dynasty. This remained kingdom for long and a protectorate state of India before its merger in 1975 as its 22nd state. The process of change was quickened from different directions, resulting in multiform ethnic mix (Sharma, 1983; p. 18).

Physical Features

Spanning Sikkim's western borders are the Khangchendzonga and the Singalila Range, a north-south spur of the Great Himalaya. The northern limits, which reach out to the Tibetan Plateau, the Donkia Range straddles while the Chola Range bound the eastern flank. The average steepness is about 45 degrees. Sikkim encompasses the Lesser Himalaya, Central Himalaya, and the Tethys Himalaya. The major mountain peaks of Sikkim are; Khangchendzonga-8,846 m, Jonsang-7,444 m, Talung-7,351 m, Kabru-7,338 m, Siniolchu-6,887 m, Pandim-6,691 m, Rathong-6,680 m Koktang-6,148 m, and Simvo-6,811 m. There are numerous perennial lakes in Sikkim among which, Khechiperi, Gurudongmar, Chho Lhamu, Changu and Menmetsho are some of the more scenic.

Having an area of 7096 sq. km. the whole state is divided into four administrative zones; north, south, east and west districts with their headquarters at Mangan, Namchi, Gangtok and Gyalshing respectively. The State receives an Annual Rainfall of 2000 mm. to 4000 mm. The state is wholly a hilly cum mountainous state with varied elevations. The land area can be grouped as -

1. Lower Hills - Altitude from 270 m. to 1500m. above mean sea level.

2. Mid Hills – Altitude from 1500 m. to 2000m.
3. Higher Hills – Altitude from 2000 m. to 3500m.
4. Alpine Zone – Altitude from 3500 m. to 5000m., with vegetation.
5. Snow bound line – Higher reaches of mountains without vegetation and with perpetual snow cover up to 8580 mtrs.

Sikkim provides a great variety of habitats, and this is reflected in the richness of its flora and fauna. The animals in the state are estimated to comprise 144 species of mammals, like Bhral, Clouded leopard, Snow leopard, Leopard cat, Red panda, Musk deer, Great Tibetan sheep, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan fox, Will ass, over 1000 species of Butterflies and moths. Flowering plants comprise about 4500 species, fern and fern allies' account for more than 350 species. The vegetation changes from one altitude to other and has been cleared for cultivation, however, wherever it survives, it is dominated by Sal in the middle hills. Coniferous and oak forest of temperate character to the higher slopes with sub-alpine scrub and stony alpine 'meadows' generally related to the high mountain flora of the north temperate zone.

The variety of elevation gives Sikkim diverse climatic condition. At the lower altitudes the climate is warm and humid during the summer and monsoon months (June-October) and moderately cold during the winter months (December-February). But as one goes higher, the winter months can be very severe and although Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, at 5,500 feet (1678mtr.) can be said to have a moderate winter, Lachen and Lachung and the areas near Dzungri in West Sikkim are snow covered most of the winter months.

Sacred Places

Supernatural phenomena are immanent in the material world of Sikkimese people. The qualities of sacredness attach to space – Mountain peaks, Hills, Rivers, Lakes, Caves, Rocks etc., whether domestic architecture or the subcontinent itself. An enormous range of geographical features possesses sacred properties. Some are inherent and some are acquired through association with a holy individual or deity. The most sacred places are the places of worship of different faith and belief. For Hindus the temples, for Christians the Churches, for Limboos the Mangkhims, for Buddhists the Monasteries, for Muslims the Masjids etc. scattered throughout the state of Sikkim are the sacred places of worship. On the recommendation of the Committee submitted to the Government on 24th April 2001, the Government has declared all sacred peaks, caves, rocks, lakes and hot springs as the most sacred Buddhist places of worship in Sikkim and protected them under the provisions of the places of worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 vide Government Notification No. 355 dated 29th September, 2001 (Subba, 2008). It is worth mentioning that the members of the Committee constituted vide Notification No. 52/Home/98 dated 24.09.1998 selected sacred places only from the Buddhist point of view.

Sacred Peaks

- (i) Ghangchhen-m Zod-Nga (Kanchanjunga – Main 28,208 ft.)
(Khangchendzonga) (Kanchenjunga – South 27,803 ft.)
(Kanchenjunga – West 27,625 ft.)

- (ii) Mt. Narsing 19,111 ft.
- (iii) Gabur Gangtsen (Kabru North, 24,075 ft.)
(Kabru South, 24,005 ft.)
(Kabru Dome, 21,600 ft.)
- (iv) Pandim Peak, 21,658 ft.
- (v) Mt. Simvo, 22,346 ft.
- (vi) Goecha Peak 20,100 ft.
- (vii) Fork Peak 20,382 ft.
- (viii) Pao Hungri 23,180 ft.
- (ix) Mt. Siniolchu 22,609 ft.

Sacred Caves

- (i) Sharchhogbayphug at Sangmo, South Sikkim
- (ii) Khadosangphug at Sanganath, South Sikkim
- (iii) Dechenphug above Nampung, West Sikkim
- (iv) Lharinyingphug via Kongri-Labdang, West Sikkim
- (v) Phagmorong, West Sikkim
- (vi) Tragtungrong, West Sikkim

Sacred Rocks (Naydo)

- (i) Yongzokdrak, West Sikkim
- (ii) Tragkar rock at Tashiding, West Sikkim
- (iii) Gyalwa Lhatsun Chhenpo's Footprint at Yuksam,
- (iv) Coronation throne at Yuksom, West Sikkim
- (v) Thegchhok Yangtse Khadoi Drora rock, West Sikkim
- (vi) Guru Rimpoche's Footprint Naydo at Tsunthang (Chungthang), North Sikkim
- (vii) Kabilongtsok stone Naydo at Kabi, North Sikkim.

Sacred Lakes (Tsho)

- (i) Omechho (Omai-tsho), West Sikkim
- (ii) Sungmteng Chho (Tsho), West Sikkim
- (iii) Lamchho (Lham-tsho), West Sikkim
- (iv) Tolechho (Dhole-tsho), West Sikkim
- (v) Kabur Lamchho (Gabur Lah-tsho), West Sikkim
- (vi) Khachhoedpalri Pemachen Tsho (Khachhoedpalri lake), West Sikkim
- (vii) Kathogtsho at Yuksam, West Sikkim
- (viii) Tsho-mGo lake, east Sikkim
- (ix) Guru Dongmar lake, North Sikkim
- (x) Tsho-lhamo, North Sikkim
- (xi) Mulathingkhai-tsho (Green Lake) at Zema Glacier, North Sikkim

They completely neglected the sacred peaks, caves, rocks, lakes, etc. of the ancient people of the Lepcha (Menrees), Tsongs (Tsongrees or Limboos) and other communities. The ancient tradition of the Lepcha says that the progenitor Lepchas "*Fodong-Theeng*" and "*Na-Jong-Nue*" were created by their God Rum out of the snows of the untrodden peak of the *King-tzum-Song-bu* mountain. Their leader Thekong-Tek signed the blood brotherhood treaty with Khe-Bumsa at Kabi-Lungchok. Similarly, Sirijunga cave where the Mahatma Sirijunga of the Limboo community of Sikkim was hiding; and the Stone where he started his preaching of Yuma religion at Martam during 1734-1741 AD, are also missing from the list (Subba, 2008).

Population of Sikkim: 2001

STATE/ SECTOR DISTRICT		POPULATION		
		PERSONS	MALE	FEMALE
North	Rural	39782	22643	17139
	Urban	1248	771	477
	Total	41030	23414	17616
East	Rural	192188	104150	88038
	Urban	52852	28767	24085
	Total	245040	132917	112123
South	Rural	27579	66096	61483
	Urban	3946	2145	1801
	Total	131525	68241	63284
West	Rural	121432	62885	58547
	Urban	1824	1027	797
	Total	123256	63912	59344
SIKKIM	Rural	480981	255774	225207
	Urban	59870	32710	27160
	Total	540851	288484	252367
INDIA	Rural	741660293	38114114	360519109
	Urban	285354954	15013584	135219060
	Total	1027015247	53127708	495738169

Source: Census of India, Sikkim, 2001 – Final Population Totals

In the population table district-wise population of Sikkim is mentioned (Census, 2001) with a distinctive outlook of Indian population, from where the reader can understand the comparative figure. As time goes the population has increased in a rapid manner, much infiltration has been taken place time and again which shows a direct influence to the original inhabitant for the survival.

The area under the study is mainly chosen from the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR), which lies in the West and North district of Sikkim considering the view of the Lepcha population concentration, which is more in this part, while the 'Dongu' is believed to be the mother land of the Lepcha of Sikkim. In the west district, the study had been carried out in different hamlets (*bustees*), lying under the revenue villages, like, (a) Yuksam (under Yuksam-Dubdi Gram Panchayat), (b) Tsozo (under Tsozo-Lethang Gram Panchayat) and (c) Khecheopalri (under Khecheopalri Gram Panchayat). A total number of 636 households with a total population of 3385 (Census of India, 2001) souls are inhabited in west districts; of which about 75 per cent are tribal (Lepcha and Bhutia are regarded as the tribal people in Sikkim). They are mostly residing in the remote hill-slope hamlets in the vicinity of forest.

Showing the areas of West Sikkim



Showing the areas of North Sikkim



In the north district of Sikkim, the study was conducted in Dzongu, an isolated place separated from the district headquarter Mangan by the river Teesta. Dzongu is a Tibetan word and combination of two syllables, i.e., *Dzon*, means hillock and *gu* means nine, which makes to understand that the place Dzongu is the concentration of nine hillocks. Dzongu is somewhat a triangular mountainous land having approximately 60 kms., on each side, bounded on the south-east by the river Teesta, on the north-east by the river Talung and on the third side by the mountain peaks of Khangchendzonga. The land is excessively precipitous; the rivers are at about 700 meter above the sea-level and the average height of the hills is about 4200 meter; but the peaks rise to more than double that height Khangchendzonga at the head of the Talung valley, which dominates the western

horizon. Except for a few artificially leveled places of flat ground in the whole district; the tracks are very much steep and too uneven for it to be easy for mules to track, let alone horses; all traveling has to be done on foot, and all goods transported by human portorage.

The river valleys are hot, steamy and somewhat malicious, and consequently there are no houses right on the river, though the ground is used for raising subtropical plants; there are however occasional houses about 180 meter higher up. Most of the houses and cultivated land are between 1200 meter and 2500 meter above sea level, a relatively narrow band above the two rivers, though occasionally fields are made at even higher altitudes. Above the cultivated land is the forest in which wild produce is gathered, a decreasing amount of hunting done, and to which the cattle are sent up to pasture in the winter months. Above the forest level comes first the rhododendron forest, and then the snow, rarely visited except by hunters searching either for ibex and musk deer or for the wild aconite, which forms the basis of their arrow, poison (Gorer, 2005; p. 56). The *Dzongu* is considered as the '*Mayel Lyang*' (hidden city) of the Lepcha and it is believed that from where they had been originated (Tamsang, 1982, p.22).

The area, *Dzongu*, is administratively divided in two parts – (a) the lower *Dzongu* and (b) upper *Dzongu*. In administrative point of view the lower *Dzongu* has altogether two GPU (Gram Panchayat Unit) – (i) Gnor-Samdong and (ii) Hee-Gyathang. The upper *Dzongu* has altogether five gram Panchayat unit (GPU), namely (i) Lingthem-Lingdem, (ii) Sakyong-Pentong, (iii) Shipgyar-Salim Pakhel, (iv) Tingboon-Linzya and (v) Lingdong-Berfok.